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A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PAUL,
L O N D O N,

BEFORE HIS

M A J E S T Y,

AND BOTH

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT,

ON THURSDAY, APRIL 23d, 1789,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A

GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

By BEILBY, LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

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THE FOURTH EDITION.

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M.DCC.LXXXIX.

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" Sabbati, 25^o die Aprilis, 1789.

" ORDERED,

**" THAT the Thanks of this House be given
" to the LORD BISHOP OF LONDON, for the excel-
" lent Sermon by him preached before His
" MAJESTY and both HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, at
" St. Paul's Church, on Thurfday last, the Day of
" Public Thanksgiving appointed by His MAJESTY;
" and that Mr. ROBERT SMITH, and Mr. WILBER-
" FORCE, do attend his Lordship with the Thanks
" of this House.**

" J. HATSEL, Cl. Dom. Com."

PSALM xxvii. 16.

O TARRY THOU THE LORD'S LEISURE; BE STRONG,
AND HE SHALL COMFORT THINE HEART; AND
PUT THOU THY TRUST IN THE LORD.

THAT this life is not, and was not intended to be, a state of perfect happiness, or even of constant ease and tranquillity, is a truth which no one will be disposed to controvert. That we are beset with dangers, and exposed to calamities of various kinds, which we can neither foresee nor avert, is equally certain. It is a fact, which, probably, most of those, who now hear me know too well, from their own experience; and the rest will most assuredly know it, full time enough:

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For there cannot be a weaker or more childish imagination, than to flatter ourselves with the hope of passing through the world without our share of those calamities, which are inseparable from mortality. Affliction then, of one kind or other, being unavoidable, it is evidently a matter of the very last importance to every human Being, to enquire carefully what are the best and most solid supports and consolations under it, where they are to be found, and how to be secured. Now the shortest and most effectual way of obtaining satisfaction on these points is, to apply to men of the best judgment, and most experience in the case; to those who have themselves passed through the greatest variety of sufferings, have sought for every possible alleviation of them that could be found, and are therefore the best able to decide on the value and the efficacy of the remedies they have actually tried. If we turn our thoughts to men of this description, we shall find few persons better qualified to give us compleat information on this head, than the Royal Author of the Text before us. He was initiated early in the school of adversity; and though he was afterwards raised, by the hand of Providence, to a Throne, yet, in
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that exalted situation, he experienced a long succession of the severest trials, and the bitterest afflictions, that are incident to human nature. How much he felt on these occasions is sufficiently evident from his writings, in which he gives vent to the distress and agony of his soul in the strongest and most impassioned language that grief can dictate. Yet with these complaints are mingled generally the warmest expressions of gratitude and thankfulness, for the unspeakable comforts he frequently experienced under these calamities, and the hopes he entertained, not only of being enabled to bear them patiently, but of finally triumphing over them. From whence then were these comforts and these hopes derived? This is the great question; the great object of our present enquiry. And the answer to it is in few words. They were derived from TRUST IN GOD. This it was which he declared to be his great refuge in distress, his shield, his rock, his castle, his house of defence, his best and firmest stay under all his various misfortunes. This holy confidence is indeed the most striking and prominent feature in his character. It discovers itself in every page of his writings. It sometimes throws a ray of cheerfulness

even over his gloomiest moments, and unexpectedly turns his heaviness into joy. "In the Lord put I my trust," says he, "how say ye then to my soul, that she should flee as a bird unto the hill? The Lord is my refuge, and my God is the strength of my confidence. In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, thy comforts have refreshed my soul. They that know thy name will put their trust in thee, for thou, Lord, hast never failed them that seek thee." And again in the words of the text, "O tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord."

This great example then is a powerful recommendation of that sovereign medicine to the afflicted soul, TRUST IN GOD. But does christianity also encourage us to have recourse to it? And does it promise us the same consolation that the Royal Psalmist derived from it? These are enquiries well worthy our most serious attention: and they will lead us to reflexions peculiarly adapted to the present joyful solemnity.

Now the first thing that naturally presents itself to our thoughts on this subject is, that most comfortable doctrine of an over-ruling Providence, which Revelation teaches and establishes on the firmest grounds.

It is impossible for any thinking man, who supposes that the world and all its affairs are under no other direction than that of chance and fortune, to enjoy any true and permanent tranquillity of mind. Every one must feel himself uneasy and wretched, at having his all embarked on so precarious a bottom, and the whole happiness of his life left to the mercy of the next accident that may befall him. There is such a variety of evils to which human nature is continually exposed, and from which no human prudence can possibly secure us, that without a firm confidence in some powerful Superintendent, who is both able and willing to protect us, we must be under perpetual apprehensions for ourselves, and those who are most dear to us. But that there *is* such a superintending power all nature proclaims aloud; all the discoveries of science confirm it; and the Holy Scriptures assert it, in the clearest and most explicit terms.

terms. They inform us, that we are under the constant guardianship of an Almighty Friend and Protector, who sees the very minutest events, and governs the most casual; who in the immense range of creation does not forget or overlook the least or meanest of his creatures; who commands us to "take no thought for the morrow, but to cast all our care upon him because he careth for us;" who has declared that "as he clothes the grass of the field, so will he much more clothe us;" that "the very hairs of our head are all numbered;" and that he will never leave us or forsake us."

Here now is a firm and adequate foundation for enjoyment of the present moment, and indifference about the next. Under the persuasion that no disaster can reach us without his permission, who watches over us with an eye that never slumbers, and a tenderness which nothing but guilt can withdraw from us, we can face those unknown terrors from which Pagan philosophy turned away dismayed; can look forward unmoved into futurity, and contemplate all the possible contingencies that may befall us, with intrepidity and unconcern; with
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the chearfulness of a mind at perfect ease, reposing itself in full confidence and security on the great disposer of all worldly events.

Such is the support which TRUST IN GOD affords us against the fear of future ill, one of the most fruitful and formidable sources of human misery.

But when our fears are verified, and calamity has actually overtaken us, what comfort can we then derive from this boasted principle?

We derive from it this most effectual and substantial one; that the gracious author and preserver of our being will (if we serve him faithfully) permit nothing to befall us, but what is *upon the whole beneficial to us*; and that, in the great variety and seemingly discordant mixture of human affairs, “ he will make all things work together “ for good to them that love him.” He expressly tells us, that “ whom he loveth, he chastneth, and scourgeth “ every son whom he receiveth.” Afflictions, therefore, far from being any marks of God’s displeasure,
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are proofs of his kindness to us. They are fatherly corrections, they are friendly admonitions, they are salutary, though unpalatable medicines. They are in short instruments in the hands of our Maker, to improve our minds, to rectify our failings, to detach us from the present scene, to fix our affections on things above, and thus form in us that humble and devout temper of mind, and unblemished sanctity of life, which are necessary to qualify us for the great purpose of our creation, the attainment of everlasting happiness in another and a better world.

These considerations are a solid ground for that firm trust in the wisdom and the goodness of God, which will be sufficient to support us, even when his hand lies heaviest upon us. And we know in fact that it *has* supported the greatest and the best of men under the severest pressure of affliction.

But great as this consolation is, our divine religion has greater still in store for us. We are encouraged to hope not only for comfort and assistance *under* affliction,

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but sometimes also for relief, and even deliverance *out* of it. We are commanded “to be careful for nothing; but
 “in every thing by prayer and supplication to make our
 “requests known unto God. We are assured, that the
 “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth
 “much; that the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous,
 “and his ears are open to their prayer; that godliness
 “is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the
 “life that now is, and of that which is to come; and
 “that if we seek first the kingdom of God, and his
 “righteousness, all other things shall be added to us.”

But how, says the Philosopher and the Disputer of this world, can these things be? How is it possible that God should thus interpose in behalf of individuals, or even of nations, without either interrupting the course of nature, or over-ruling the free agency of his rational creatures? Admitting, for a moment, this supposed difficulty; who shall presume to say that the great Governor of the Universe may not, if he sees fit, suspend, or alter, for an instant, those general laws, which he has himself established? Who will venture to affirm, that on great

and momentous occasions, which involve the fate, not only of the greatest persons, but of the greatest empires upon earth, he may not, even by extraordinary means, bring about such events, as he sees requisite for the general good ?

But these suppositions are unnecessary. There are, undoubtedly, a thousand ways in which the Supreme Lord of all may, without the least violation of the ordinary course of nature, give a new turn to human affairs, and produce, unexpectedly, the most disastrous or most beneficial effects. He can render the most regular operations of the material world, and the freest actions of his creatures, subservient to his will ; and by the instrumentality of second causes, can accomplish every purpose of his wise and righteous Government. He can, for instance, at particular periods, raise up persons with dispositions and talents peculiarly adapted to the execution of his designs. He can place them in circumstances and situations, and present to their minds objects and incitements calculated to promote the gracious ends he has in view. He can so dispose, adjust,
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and combine the common occurrences of life, as to draw from them whatever consequences he thinks fit; and (as almost every day's experience may convince us) he can, by incidents the most trivial, and apparently the most fortuitous, give birth to the most important changes and revolutions on the great Theatre of the World.

That by these and various other means (utterly beyond the reach of our conceptions) he both may, and will, whenever he sees it expedient, interpose in the concerns of men; and that he will more particularly sometimes rescue his faithful servants from impending misery and ruin, is so far from being incredible, or even improbable, that it would be injurious to the honour and dignity of his government, it would be repugnant to all our ideas of his moral attributes, and even to the clearest principles of reason and sound philosophy, to suppose the contrary.

It would be preposterous to maintain, that he has so entirely given up the reins of government out of his hands, so irrevocably bound himself by fixt and immu-

table laws and ordinances, that he can never, in any circumstances, or on any emergency, show himself plainly to be the Sovereign Ruler of the World. That he should thus manifest himself at proper intervals to the sons of men, not only to protect the good, but to awaken the thoughtless from that forgetfulness of him, into which they are but too apt to fall, seems highly requisite, and worthy of him who is the great Lord of the Universe. All ages, and all nations, have concurred in believing such interpositions of the Almighty, and have applied to him on that belief; and Revelation places the doctrine beyond all controversy.

And, thanks be to God, these conclusions of Reason, and these promises of Scripture, have been happily confirmed to us by our own repeated experience. There is not a nation upon earth, that has been favoured with a greater number of providential deliverances than our own; and there are none of these that are impressed with plainer and more unequivocal marks of a Divine Interposition, than that, which is now the subject of our Thanksgivings to Heaven. Incredulity itself has been
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compelled to own, that the hand of God has been visible on the present occasion; nor is the joy of the nation more universal, than its belief of that great and important truth. But above all, the heart of our SOVEREIGN is deeply impressed with this conviction, that IN GOD WAS HIS HELP; and that, to his peculiar blessing on the means used for his recovery, that recovery is to be ascribed. Throughout the whole of his severe trial, his TRUST IN GOD never forsook him: and before that God he now appears in this holy and venerable structure, surrounded with his faithful and affectionate subjects, to offer up, in the most public manner, and with a seriousness and a solemnity suited to the occasion, his praises and thanksgivings for those signal mercies, which have been so recently vouchsafed to him, and through him to this whole kingdom. A spectacle more striking, more awful, more dignified, more interesting, more edifying, has scarce ever been presented to the observation of mankind. I know not whether we are to except even that celebrated one recorded in the first book of Kings, where a great and a pious Monarch, in the presence of his whole kingdom, prostrated himself before that magnificent edifice, which

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he had just erected to the honour of his Maker, and then spreading forth his hands towards Heaven, poured out the devout emotions of his soul, in that inimitable prayer delivered down to us in the sacred writings *. This, it must be confessed, was a scene most eminently calculated to raise the soul towards Heaven; to fill it with the sublimest conceptions of the Deity, and to impress it with the liveliest sentiments of veneration, piety, devotion, and gratitude. And surely effects of a similar nature, and little inferiour in degree, may be expected from the present awful solemnity. For though the two occasions are, it must be owned, in some respects dissimilar; though we are not now met to dedicate a TEMPLE to God; yet we are met, I trust, for a still nobler Dedication, for the Dedication of a WHOLE PEOPLE, with their SOVEREIGN at their head, to their Almighty Protector, their common Benefactor and Deliverer; for the Dedication of ourselves, our souls and bodies, throughout the whole course of our future lives, to his worship, his service, his laws, and his religion. Nothing less than

* 1 Kings viii. 22.

this

this can be an adequate return to our Heavenly Father, for raising up our beloved Sovereign from the bed of sickness, and preserving to us, in his person, every thing that is dear and valuable to us, as Men, as Britons, and as Christians. For how is it possible, on such an occasion as the present, not to remember, or not to acknowledge, the many other invaluable blessings we possess, as well as that which completes and confirms them all, that which we this day commemorate? Are we not as a people blest beyond example, and almost beyond belief? Do we not enjoy the purest mode of worship, the best constituted form of government, the most equal laws, the most able and most upright administration of justice? Are we not perfectly secure in our persons, our properties, our civil and religious liberties? Are not our manufactures flourishing, our population encreasing, our public burthens gradually lessening, our agriculture highly improved, our commerce boundless? Are not the marks of peace, of comfort, of chearfulness, of affluence, visible on every side; and are not our credit, and reputation abroad, commensurate to our prosperity and happiness at home?

If this be a true picture of our situation, how can we ever express, as we ought, our thankfulness to the gracious Author of all these mercies? It is not the observance, it is not the devotion, however ardent, of a single day, that can be a sufficient evidence of our gratitude. The only sure and certain proof of our sincerity, is the reformation of our hearts, and the future holiness of our lives. This is a language which cannot be mistaken; in which there can be no dissimulation or disguise; a language, which speaks to the senses of mankind, and is sure of being heard and accepted at the Throne of Grace. In the exterior acts of worship, our hearts may not always accompany our lips. We may be lukewarm, inattentive, or insincere. But he, who from a principle of gratitude to heaven, renounces those favourite sins, which most easily beset him, and devotes himself to the service of his Maker, can never be suspected of pretended sanctity or hypocritical devotion. Here then at this solemn hour, and in this sacred place, when we are offering up our thanksgivings to God, let us, at the same time, sacrifice, at the foot of his altar, our vices, our follies, our passionate fondness for diversions, our excessive attachments to
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any pursuits that tend to draw off our affections from Heaven and heavenly things: and more especially our frequent, our growing profanations of that sacred day which our Maker claims as his own; which is the great security and bulwark of our religion; the great barrier against the inroads of secularity and dissipation; which ought never to be debased by unbecoming levities, by worldly occupations, by dangerous amusements, by any thing, in short, that tends to defecrate the Christian Sabbath, to obliterate that mark of discrimination, which Divine authority and primitive usage have stamped upon it, and to sink it into the common mass of unhallowed days. It is a festival, we own, it is a most joyful festival; but it is a religious one too; and it should be observed, not with intemperate gaiety, nor yet with a gloomy and austere superstition, but with that rational piety, that decent, modest, chastised, and sober cheerfulness, which so well becomes the character of the day; and which (with some exceptions) has, in fact, usually distinguished it in this kingdom. It is a distinction which does honour to us as a people. It is what few other Christian countries can boast. It is altogether worthy of the first

Protestant Church in Europe; and no reasoning, no ridicule, no false ambition to imitate the freer manners of our neighbours on the continent, should ever induce us to give it up.

But, at the same time, let not external observances constitute the *whole* of our religion; let us be Christians, not in name and appearance only, but in deed and in truth; and above all, let us cultivate that heavenly spirit of meekness, gentleness, forbearance, candour, equity, and charity, which is the distinguishing character of the gospel, and which ought to mark distinctly every part of our conduct, both public and private. Let it instantly banish from our hearts “all bitterness, and wrath, and “clamour, and anger, and evil-speaking, with all “malice;” and let us become, what we have every reason upon earth to become, a contented, a thankful, a united, a virtuous, a religious people. Let this place be the grave of every unchristian sentiment and passion; let this day be the æra of general harmony and concord. We have met here in joy; let us depart in peace. Let us, both as individuals and as members of the community

nity (for the precept applies to us in both capacities) be
 "kind and tender-hearted one towards another," watchful
 over ourselves, respectful and dutiful to all our lawful
 superiours, grateful and obedient to God.

If these be our resolutions respecting our future conduct, we may then safely apply to ourselves that sublime benediction with which Solomon dismissed the people, when the great business of the Dedication was closed.
 " May the Lord our God be with us, as he was with our
 " fathers; let him not leave us, or forsake us. That he
 " may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his
 " ways, and to keep his commandments, and his
 " statutes, and his judgements, which he commanded
 " our fathers. And let these my words, wherewith
 " I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh
 " unto the Lord our God, day and night, that he may
 " maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his
 " people, at all times, as the matter shall require. That
 " all the people of the earth may know that the Lord
 " is

“ is God, and that there is none else. Let your heart
“ therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk
“ in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as
“ at this day *.”

* 1 Kings viii. 57.

THE END.



